

Living & Working in Difficult Times

Washington State Employee Assistance Program

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Many employees including management are feeling increasingly fearful and anxious in our American workplaces. Current events related to war, SARS, budget woes, layoffs, changes and losses in the workplace, and other uncertainties can take a toll and can create fear and anxiety. Even though we may be unable to eliminate the cause of fear, fortunately there are ways we can successfully manage our fears. Traumatic events as well as prolonged periods of uncertainty can result in stress and fear. Our reactions can impact us on many different levels, including our physical body, emotional responses and patterns of thinking. When fear escalates, it can lead to a feeling of overall anxiety. Eventually, if we are not aware of and careful to manage the anxiety, fear takes control of us, rather than us controlling the fear. There are things that we can do to take effective control of fear.

Identify and analyze your fear

Imagine that you are looking from the outside and examining your fear:

- Where is the fear coming from?
- What do you think will actually happen to you?
- For whom do you fear--yourself or others?
- Do you fear you will be harmed or fear that you may lose something?

After you have answered these questions, you can analyze the likelihood that what you fear will actually happen.

Control exposure that will reinforce your fears

Exposure may come from watching and re-watching fearful events on television or listening and re-listening to negative people or radio talk shows or reports. Are you monitoring Internet messages to make sure they are from reliable sources and are not merely thoughts designed to fuel people's fears? When you watch, listen, or read, try to determine what is fact and what is speculation.

Ask yourself the question, "Is this something I can control?"

Much worry can be eliminated or reduced by realizing that we cannot control certain situations. We are then empowered to focus on that over which we have control and then can take appropriate action.

Look at what other events are occurring in your life

If we are dealing with other stressful situations, we may feel even more vulnerable. Sometimes new fear can also trigger thoughts of traumatic events that occurred in the past. It is important then in times of stress that we are aware of this and practice good

stress management techniques.

Explore resources available to help you manage fear

Local agencies, government or healthcare organizations provide information that can protect us from potential risk or danger. Learn what resources are available in your community. Education is empowering. Trained employee assistance professionals at the Employee Assistant Program can provide assessment, short term problem resolution as well as helpful referrals for professional or ongoing assistance. Talking with friends, family, neighbors or co-workers can be very helpful.

Tap into spiritual beliefs

Often, people who have spiritual beliefs, find comfort and strength as they seek support from those beliefs. During times of crisis, connecting spiritually with others can be helpful.

Take a look at history

Looking back into your own life or into other times of crisis in our nation and recalling victory and success can help encourage us to face the current crisis. Remembering our own courage and strength and the strength of others can provide new hope and courage.

Fearful situations not only indicate the potential for danger but also the potential for opportunity. History has shown that fortune can come from misfortune. You, your fellow Americans and co-workers can rise to the challenge and come together to share concerns and resources and focus on the hope of a strong tomorrow.